

## MEETING MINUTES (FINAL)

### HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN Technical Advisory Committee Wednesday, April 4, 2007, 1pm to 3pm Arizona Game and Fish Department Tucson, Arizona

## MEETING MINUTES

### City of Tucson Technical Advisory Committee:

Rich Glinski

Linwood Smith (EPG Associates)

Marit Alanen (USFWS)

Guy McPherson (University of Arizona)

Karen LaMartina (Tucson Water)

### Attendees:

Leslie Liberti, (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development)

Ann Audrey (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development)

Geoff Soroka (SWCA)

David Jacobs (Arizona State Land Department)

### **1. Minutes**

None available for review at this time

### **2. Updates**

City has hired a Sustainability Director for OCSD, David Schaller. He will start in October after retirement from USEPA Region 9, where he is the Sustainable Development Coordinator and Regional Climate Change Coordinator. He is originally from Tucson.

Buffelgrass was burned on City holdings along Reservation Road in Avra Valley. They burned about 3/8 of the area they had hoped to burn due to lack of wind to keep the fire moving. A vegetation transect was done before the burn so there will be a comparison on vegetation density before and after. Burrowing owls were surveyed immediately before the burn and the areas around them were mowed before the burn. The burn was photographed by Travis Bean and filmed by channel 12. There was media coverage of the event, and it also served as training for the Avra Valley Fire Department. The City now has land in 3 different buffelgrass treatments: burned, mowed and unmowed. Each will be treated with herbicide when the grass greens up.

Meetings have been on-going regarding the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) funding of \$45 million for wildlife crossings. TAC members can contact OCSD for information on upcoming meetings, or check with Pima Association of Governments

(PAG), which organizes the meetings. AGFD is the technical advisor to the group, particularly the research side of AGFD. Marit asked if statewide wildlife corridors are being incorporated into the planning. Leslie explained that there is an exercise going on within the Wildlife Linkages group to get a regional vision of how to prioritize project needs for wildlife corridors, including new projects, retrofits, land acquisition, and which species to look at.

Ann reported that a black bear cub was seen at CAVSRP recently. AGFD attempted to trap it, but the bear left the site.

### **3. Southlands**

Updated species data including tables of stressors and threats, and habitat maps, were provided as handouts. The discussion is summarized below.

#### Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl (CFPO)

Leslie reported that in previous maps CFPO habitat was restricted to major washes. A new map shows an expanded areas per input from Scott Richardson at USFWS. The map shows suitable breeding habitat, which is not restricted to riparian habitat. He felt saguaros in the upland could support breeding. Riparian areas could provide dispersal habitat Scott felt the central area of the Southlands, shown in orange, is not suitable for CFPO because of the presence of the railroad and interstate and less appropriate vegetation. During his meeting with Leslie, Scott reported there was a pygmy owl siting at “La Osa,” the area on the Santa Cruz River just north of the Pima/Pinal County line, where land was bladed several years ago. There are now 3 eggs produced by captive CFPO at Wild at Heart. A petition has been submitted to relist CFPO. Leslie noted the stressors and threats table is not updated yet, but is not likely to change much.

#### Burrowing owl (BUOW)

The stressors and threats table for burrowing owls was edited by David Grandmaisson of AGFD. He made very few changes from the earlier version, just noting that the limited availability of borrows will influence habitat suitability, and movement of people may be a problem depending on frequency, proximity and duration. The previous map showed burrowing owl habitat as ridges outside sheet flow area. David added some additional ridge areas he felt would be suitable for BUOW based on informal site observation. These are additive to the original locations that Marit and Leslie already mapped. Rich asked if David included the floodplain zone that was eliminated in earlier mapping, and if so whether the areas he mapped were near the top of the floodplain so flooding might not be as much of an issue there.

#### Pima pineapple cactus (PPC) and needle spined pineapple cactus (NSPC)

Leslie reported that Marc Baker finished his cactus survey work and a draft report has been received. He noted 279 PPC, 12 of which were dead, and 6 were incidental. He estimated a density of 1 PPC per 1.65 hectares of land based on what he looked at. He noted that PPC was absent in the northern part of the study area and present in the Vail area and to the south. NSPC were found in the tip of the northeast part of the old study

area. Marc provided a map of the current survey results showing almost all detected cacti in the southern part of the study area, south of Vail. After the survey performed on the original Southlands study area Marc provided polygons predicting where he thought the density would be found. He will prepare a similar map of polygons for the expanded study area.

#### Lesser long nosed bat (LLNB)

A habitat model was prepared for LLNB based on Scott Richardson's direction. The cross-hatched area on the map shows possible roost sites. Based on where agaves are present he delineated areas on the north, east and south parts of the study area indicating foraging area.

#### Pale townsend's big-eared bat (PTBB)

The original model for PTBB habitat was upland communities without riparian areas. The edge along riparian areas is also favorable habitat. Three maps were handed out showing buffer zones of 50 ft, 100 ft, and 200 ft around riparian areas. A request was made to zoom in on the study area to see what the buffers look like overlaid with an aerial photo. Linwood proposed doing this for 100-foot and 200-foot buffers. ***Guy requested a calculation of the original habitat area and modified habitat areas that are captured by the buffers.\* Linwood said take some random areas for close ups to get a feel for the effects of the buffers.*** Stressors and threats are not likely to change, per Linwood.

#### Desert tortoise

HDMS records were mapped, showing a concentration of tortoise at the east end of Colossal Cave Road. The Rincon Knolls development site located on the Pantano Wash is a 176 acre site with 62 burrows and 15 tortoises detected during a survey conducted by Tierra Right of Way. Previously there had been a focus on mountain slopes as habitat, but this site is along the edge of the Pantano Wash. Rich thought the Southlands might be a hotbed of tortoise habitat. Leslie said some Segment 3 grant money should be put toward research into desert tortoise. Noting how quickly this area is being developed, Rich wondered if residents of developments could collect data on tortoise presence, which could help provide numbers and distribution data to scientists. Scott is using this citizen-science approach with LLNB, with people reporting on bat use at feeders. If citizen data collection occurs, this should be quantified as volunteer participation as part of the grant application match requirement. Citizens could call a tortoise hotline to report data. Scott is getting good public response to his requests for data on LLNB.

Trevor will organize a desert tortoise subcommittee of experts. Scientists at Tierra who conducted the Rincon Knolls survey should be invited. TAC members who want to participate are Trevor, Cathy, Ann, and Linwood. Marit suggested including Marty Teugel or Doug Duncan from USFWS. The tortoise currently has no status in Arizona, though there have been attempts to list it in the past. Continuing development represents a threat to its habitat, along with upper respiratory disease which is taking a toll. It is considered by this TAC and the Marana TAC as likely to be listed. The Desert Tortoise Council is focusing on the Mohave Desert Tortoise, but not the Sonoran Desert Tortoise.

Of the species already discussed at this meeting, BUOW, LLNB and desert tortoise are the species that might need additional research.

#### Yellow billed cuckoo (YBC)

A large format map was held up showing YBC habitat as mapped by Brian Woolridge. This habitat consists of dense riparian areas, including hydriparian and xeriparian areas.

#### Gila top minnow and Gila chub

Gila top minnow and Gila chub information was provided by Doug Duncan of USFWS. He said impacts to hydrologic regime, such as sediment transport, can impact the fish. Trevor suggested creating a 500-meter buffer around Cienega Creek as the area of land where development might impact habitat long with creek. ***OCSD prepare 500-meter buffer map.*** Leslie asked the opinion of the TAC as to whether the area downstream of the dam should be included in the habit area for the fish. Marit asked when the creek floods whether flow breeches the dam or not. ***Leslie will check with PAG to find out whether surface water monitoring data indicates that the dam overflows.*** The dammed water goes to the golf course. There are no plans to expand the reclaimed system this far out at this time.

#### Southwest willow flycatcher (SWWF)

Doug Duncan, Brian Woolridge and Jason Douglass felt SWWF could occur in the Southlands. There are breeding records at Las Cienegas, which is a little way upstream, however, there have not been sitings of SWWF at Cienega Creek. AZGF just prepared a nongame technical report on SWWF, but it doesn't appear there are regular surveys being conducted for this species. Rich wondered why AGFD is not routinely collecting data. Geoff asked where the cottonwood willow habitat is on Cienega Creek. Linwood said this habitat is upstream of the Marsh Station Crossing. The TAC felt SWWF habitat could be modeled the same as that for the fish.

#### Basis for Conservation Requirements

Leslie commented that overlaying habitat models for multiple species in the Avra Valley had resulted in almost the entire study area having habitat for one or more species. As a result, for Avra Valley, the TAC developed a more corridor-based watershed model. The Southlands will likely be primarily residential development as opposed to water projects that may occur in Avra Valley. Leslie asked what a good starting point would be for conservation planning. Guy suggested making it species-specific. Leslie suggested grouping species by cohorts with similar habitat use. She described 3 basic groups. The first group depends on Cienega Creek: Huachuca water umble, Gila top minnow, Gila chub, lowland leopard frog, Mexican garter snake, SWWF. The second group is riparian-related species who use habitat outside Cienega Creek: CFPO, PTBB, YBC. The rest of the species, BUOW, PPC, NSPC, LLNB and Desert Tortoise, could be looked at as overlaps on a map, but should also be looked at separately on a species-by-species basis. In particular, NSPC and PPC are in non-riparian areas, LLNB is vegetation-related and also overlaps with some human areas, and BUOW is driven by burrow availability. Rich

suggested looking at specific geographic areas as a starting point and seeing what species are affected in these geographic locations. Leslie said the TAC will start with the non-Cienega riparian-area species at the next meeting.

#### **4. Topics at upcoming meetings**

A schedule for activities over the next several years was handed out and described by Leslie. Per this schedule, discussions of the Southlands will dominate through the end of August. In April/May, the City will release a new RFP for consulting services on an on-call basis. This will include support for the HCP, but will also allow species research. Applicants may respond to the RFP to propose addressing individual species on the list. Those interested in doing such research should submit applications once the RFP is posted. ***OCSD will send the RFP out to TAC members when its ready and it will also be posted on the website.***

The current Segment 2 IGA between the City and AGFD is supposed to go through the end of June 2007, with goal of finishing the Avra Valley HCP and portions of the Southlands HCP. However, this deadline would be difficult to meet and additional survey work is needed on some species. Therefore, the City is requesting a 1-year extension on Segment 2. The City and AGFD want to have the IGA for Segment 3 approved by end of June 2007 so it can be used to support the LLNB surveys, with AGFD listed as a research partner.

##### 2007 HCP preparation schedule

- June to August: TAC will continue discussing Southlands over the summer. The Avra Valley conservation concept will be discussed with species-specific experts to get their input as to whether it is adequate. These discussions will happen outside TAC meetings. Over the summer, OCSD will convene expert groups to discuss the draft and will let TAC members know that technical subcommittee meetings are being conducted so members can attend if they wish. Research will begin on the LLNB.
- September to October: New species information will be incorporated in the Avra Valley conservation and monitoring/adaptive management program. Then the TAC will take up the Avra Valley discussion, with revisions based on summer meetings with expert groups. During this period it will be necessary to determine 2008 study priorities.
- November to December: The revised Southlands draft will be assembled and given to the TAC for review.

##### 2008 HCP preparation schedule

- January to February: The TAC will receive the Avra HCP to review. The City will addresses TAC comments on the Southlands draft.
- March to April: Draft Avra and Southlands HCPs will go to RPAC for review
- May: Revised HCPs will be submitted to AGFD. The city will file a Notice of Intent for Avra Valley, and have the scoping meeting.
- June: AGFD comments to HCPs will be addressed prior to submittal of the HCPs to USFWS. Segment 2 work will be finalized

- July to December: Refine the Avra HCP and begin work on the draft EIS

2007 COT HCP TAC Meeting Schedule through the end of summer

May 2, 1 to 3pm, AGFD

May 16, 1 to 3 pm, AGFD

June 6, 1 to 4pm (begin 3 hour monthly meetings for the summer)

July 18, 1 to 4pm

August 15, 1 to 4pm,

## **5. Call to audience**

No public at the meeting

## **6. Adjournment**